

Situation Report

Osh/Geneva – 08/2010

Huge daily challenges to recovery amidst continued insecurity

This situation report is based on finding from an ACT needs assessment conducted Aravan and Bazar Korgon areas between July 28 – 31. The full report will be released next week.

More than one and a half months since communal violence in Kyrgyzstan broke out, normality has yet to be completely restored. The ethnic division is now unfortunately deep and wide. Sporadic violence is widening the gap and eroding gains achieved through humanitarian aid and efforts of reconciliation. ACT Alliance continues the distribution of fresh food produce through local partners and in coordination with other international organizations and the government.

An ACT monitoring and assessment visit in the last week of July was carried out to understand the implications of the crisis for ACT's longer-term local market development programme and to identify areas of unmet needs of the proposed target population. Findings of the assessment are summarized below:

Security and Protection

Sporadic violence and arson occur occasionally, blocking the road to peace and security in Osh and Jalalabad. Recent incidents include:

- a two-storey store was set on fire in Osh (July 26). A day earlier, the same store and nearby kiosks were looted.
- a demonstration (July 27) protesting the planned deployment of the OSCE police capacity-building force. More protests are expected.
- three houses burned down (July 28). Police and military blamed drug addicts. The blaze occurred during the curfew, causing people to doubt the curfew's effectiveness.
- fire broke out (July 24) in Nookan district of Jalalabad, damaging three houses. The joint efforts of Kyrgyz and Uzbek neighbours prevented it spreading.

Attacks reported tend to target one ethnic group, widening the ethnic divide and building back ethnic anger. Local opinion amongst some is that politicians are keeping ethnic divisions alive to polarise voters in the October election in their favour.

Reports of abuse of power, arbitrary detention, excessive use of force, ill-treatment, torture and extortion continue, causing fear and insecurity particularly among one ethnic community. In Alymbekgatka area of Osh, only women members of families were to be found in the tents and burned houses. The young men had migrated to Russia to evade harassment and extortion from the authorities. Only elderly men and women were left as they were unlikely to be harassed. In other cases, women and children have been sent to safe places. This separation of families is a major constraint to building peace and reconciliation. The insecurity continues to affect the running of local businesses with many shops still closed, though, increasingly, people have started opening their shops during the daytime.

Water

Water scarcity continues as while most water posts are intact, water is supplied only two hours a day and the supply is irregular. Although families now have more water storage containers, the quality of the water is doubtful because of the water sources and how it is being stored. After heavy rain, the treatment plant stops functioning, stopping or contaminating the water supply.

Families in camps draw water from 5000 litre water bladders provided by UNICEF and are being given chlorine tablets by humanitarian agencies. However, the tablets are being distributed without instructions on how to use them. As a result, some families were observed using the tablets to wash water containers before collecting water in them.

Sanitation and hygiene

Poor sanitation and hygiene conditions continue to be observed. Sanitation was poor prior to the conflict. Traditionally, families dug a pit (with a seat on top) which would be covered once full. Even that system has collapsed now. In some cases, 50 people are using one latrine. With formal markets destroyed or disrupted, informal markets have sprung up in some areas where there are no public latrines. The environment is becoming increasingly unhealthy as people use open areas to relieve themselves. The unhealthy pattern of latrine use is now a source of disease. Transitional shelter planning has not included latrines or bathing areas. People are coping by visiting neighbours and relatives to use latrines and to bathe, making do within the ruins of their homes or bathing in the open. The provision of proper sanitary facilities in private and public places is a matter which policy-makers must give attention.

Food and nutrition

Displaced families continue to be dependent on food aid from humanitarian agencies, friends and relatives. While livelihoods continue to be disrupted or destroyed, this is likely to continue. The revised World Food Programme target for a third food distribution cycle is 287,000 individuals. However, WFP food support is limited to wheat flour, oil and high calorie biscuits. In the absence of complementary food support, the food basket of families is nutritionally inadequate. WFP is carrying out a nationwide emergency food security assessment to establish needs through the lean winter season. Save the Children has released a multi-sector needs assessment which shows the people largely have poor, nutritionally low diets. Children under two are of particular concern.

A WFP survey of small-scale bakeries in Osh and Jalal-Abad revealed reduced capacity (with about 20 percent having closed) due to depressed consumer demand. Meat is part of the staple diet but due to lack of income families are unable to buy it. During a focus group discussion in Kyzyl Kishak, when the participants were asked if they ate food of their choice, someone murmured, "We cannot even freely walk on the street, how we can expect food of our choice?" Some families sell salvaged materials from their burned houses to buy essentials, including food. Many families have collected bricks and created temporary hearths for cooking.

Non-food items

Most people are living in the same clothing they had when their property and belongings were destroyed or left behind. The elderly need warm clothing at night. Only a few fortunate people have warm clothes. People also lack other basic items which humanitarian agencies plan to provide.

Shelter and site selection

As shelter construction will take time, government and other agencies plan to build transitional shelters for over 2000 homeless families before the onset of winter. The standard shelters will comprise core 50m² units. Smaller families will receive 30m² units. Under the programme, each household will receive a basket of construction materials such as cement, bricks, timber, sand, doors and windows. Houses will be built on the original plot of land of each house.

Local government has asked people to clear debris to enable the fast construction of transitional shelters. The presence of large amounts of asbestos in the debris is a concern. Shelter agencies are distributing protective clothing to households clearing debris but few people use it. The new buildings are supposed to be earthquake-proof but in the absence of instructions, it is unclear how families will know how to make them earthquake-resistant.

Health and psychosocial support

Pockets of people do not feel secure enough to go out to access health care services. A nationwide polio vaccination campaign has been launched which is appreciated by the public and medical professionals. Each vaccinated child has a special vaccination card. This is the first collective health intervention after the communal violence. Other essential vaccines could also be soon provided to the children.

Disabled people's health care needs more attention. Pregnant women are still not getting adequate care and are sent to other places for safe delivery. Mental health and psychosocial care for all people remains a priority while trained personnel is lacking. Russian forensic psychiatry experts plan to train 16 psychiatrists and psychologists.

Education

Schools are supposed to resume from September 1st but no attempts to reconstruct burnt schools have yet taken place. The education authorities are unable to reconstruct schools. Small repairs are being supported by UN agencies. Furthermore, parents are unwilling to send their children back to school. The government plans to use the first month of schooling to promote peace and reconciliation through schools and to remove fear among students and parents. However, that plan can only be executed if schools are built and children feel secure enough to return. School bags, books and stationery are needed, as are proper toilets in schools.

Economic development and livelihoods

The violence broke out just as crops were ready for harvesting. As a result, farmers were unable to harvest most of their crops and were then unable to find buyers for what they were able to harvest. Produce prices have fallen but the cost of agricultural inputs has gone up. Fertilizers have more than doubled since the conflict. Farmers face multiple problems:

- In the absence of buyers, they are not harvesting fields completely. What they do harvest, they are compelled to sell at low rates.
- The opportunity of a second planting has been lost. Either fields are not available or farmers lack the capital to go for a second planting.

- Farmers are finding it difficult to repay loans. Interest rates range from 23% to 29%.

In many cases, potato farmers are not harvesting fields as they do not have any hope of finding buyers. Potatoes have started rotting, making fields unfit for cultivation of the next crop at least.

ACT raised this issue in the early recovery cluster meeting, proposing a Cash for Work programme to dig potatoes, thereby saving the fields. UNDP has taken up the responsibility to try and find funds.

ACT also took up the discussion with the WFP, but WFP has neither a mandate to cover fresh food, nor a Cash-for-Work scheme in this area. The FAO responsible for fresh food, has no presence in Osh and is operating through its office in Bishkek.

ACT Response to date

The response of ACT Alliance is confined to providing complimentary food aid, building capacity of local organizations and advocacy. The food distribution has been done among 6,100 families. A family kit comprised of 13 kilos of rice, 10 kilos of noodles, 2 kilos of beans, 3 kilos of sugar, 1 kilo salt, 3 litres oil and 400 grams of tea leaves. These families were also provided fresh food which comprised of 13 kilos of potatoes and 6.5 kilos of onions. To revive the local economy, when the market was completely down, ACT Alliance made purchases of rice, potatoes and onions from the local farmers, who were also beneficiaries of the long-term development programmes.

ACT Alliance is also supporting the Coordination Council – a network of local organizations, to build its capacity to coordinate on humanitarian response. As of now, coordination of different sectors is being done by different UN agencies and international organizations, following cluster approach. Most of the coordination meetings have negligible participation from local organizations. To address this problem, ACT Alliance is working with UN OCHA to build capacity of the NGO network and play key role in the overall coordination with the international agencies and the government. In this regard, one training on Cluster System will be organized on 12th August 2010 for local organization and the government officials. Subsequently, one more training will be organized on building capacity of local organizations on damage and needs assessment.

ACT Alliance has not prepared the full Appeal, which aims to target 7,632 vulnerable families. The full Appeal intends to continue food support to the vulnerable families for next three months. More vulnerable families will be provided NFI material including winter cloths and hygiene materials. Other sectors in the Appeal are WASH, Protection, Psychosocial care, livelihoods restoration and coordination.

ACT Alliance Appeal

ACT has a US \$1,897,455 open appeal to support assistance to the affected communities in Kyrgyzstan.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jessie Kgoroadira, ACT Finance Officer (jk@actalliance.org). Thank you for your attention.

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